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RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 2201
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISLAMABAD 004819

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/12/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PK](#) [PREL](#) [AEMR](#) [AMGT](#) [CASC](#) [KFLO](#) [PINR](#)
SUBJECT: MUSHARRAF'S PRESS CONFERENCE

REF: A. ISLAMABAD 4728
[1](#)B. ISLAMABAD 4818

Classified By: Anne W. Patterson, Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Meeting with local and international press November 11, President Musharraf announced elections would be held "by January 9" and said he would take the presidential oath of office as a civilian after the Supreme Court allows the Election Commission to confirm his re-election. He declined to set a date for lifting the state of emergency, but indicated it would continue through the elections. This prompted a skeptical response from international media. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) A clearly defensive President Musharraf on November 11 addressed the local and international press corps. He immediately announced: (1) Pakistan's National Assembly will complete for the first time in Pakistan's history its full five year term on November 15; (2) the Provincial Assemblies will be dissolved on November 20; and (3) this would allow parliamentary elections before January 9, 2008. Musharraf said that the election should come before the Islamic holiday of Moharram, but that he would leave the setting of the election day to Pakistan's Election Commission (ECP).

[1](#)3. (U) Musharraf also announced that he would take the presidential oath of office "as a civilian" as soon as the Supreme Court allows the ECP to confirm the results of his October 6 re-election. In response to a Fox News question on how long the state of emergency will last, Musharraf said he "could not give a date." He indicated that elections would be held under the state of emergency.

[1](#)4. (C) Repeating much of what he said to the diplomatic corps on November 5 (Ref A), Musharraf presented his case against (former) Supreme Court Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry. He said the Court "demoralized law enforcement and encouraged terrorists," and argued that the country had moved into a state of paralysis that necessitated imposing a state of emergency. He admitted that it was "a drastic measure," but one required "to save democracy." He confirmed that the (former) Chief Justice and his court would not be reinstated.

[1](#)5. (U) Turning to media freedom, Musharraf proclaimed: "I gave independence to the media." He claimed that new restrictions on content were based on other countries' codes of conduct for the press and that only a few channels

remained off. He would not allow "defamation by design." Responding to a question about the three Telegraph reporters expelled November 11, he said the newspaper's editorial had used "unacceptable words."

¶16. (U) In responding to questions, he repeatedly committed to elections, but was equally adamant that those politicians and activists who disturbed law and order would be, or would continue to be, detained. He welcomed international observers on election day. Musharraf deliberately gave no positive signal that he would reach any political understanding with Pakistan People's Party (PPP) leader Benazir Bhutto before the elections. He noted that the parties would all compete in fair elections and that the election results would determine the make up of the future government. He stressed that it was not about personality but about political parties and how well they do. He observed that an election result in favor of Bhutto's party is by no means a foregone conclusion.

¶17. (U) Musharraf repeatedly linked the spread of terrorism to the need for imposing a state of emergency. He said he did not believe foreign aid to combat terrorism would be cut off because "unnamed" countries' leaders, with whom he had spoken, "understand this problem" in Pakistan. Musharraf believed that the emergency powers would help, not hinder, the war on terror. Furthermore, the November 10 amendment to the Army Act was to allow military courts to hear cases against those "missing," who were arrested under Pakistan's anti-terrorism laws. He denied that the amendment would allow any civilian to be charged in a military court.

¶18. (U) Musharraf ended the press conference responding to a

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local reporter's prompting for a stronger reaction to "western interference." Musharraf answered: "We do not need anyone's dictation or advice. We in Pakistan operate as per our own will." Emergency was imposed, Musharraf insisted, despite the expectation of western disapproval.

9 (C) Comment: Musharraf's rather unnerving performance did not display his usual poised, confident demeanor. He was flanked by key cabinet and political advisors, most of whom appeared uncomfortable and embarrassed by Musharraf's harangue against the (former) Chief Justice. His delivery was forced and marked by emotion. It was a far cry from the self-confident, calm and even humorous head of state who a year ago successfully appeared on "The Daily Show." While the news on an elections date is positive, it is almost impossible to envision how elections can be held under a state of emergency which suspends all political rights. End comment.
PATTERSON